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Louis Pagani

Interviewed by Michael John Topolos
Glen Ellen, 1994



Wine Library Associates of Sonoma County
Oral History Series

Louis Pagani

Interviewed by Michael John Topolos
Glen Ellen, California
1994

Transcription and Editing by
Gail Ryan
Completed 2001

Comments by Maria Pagani Marusinge,
Grandniece of Louis Pagani

Healdsburg:
Wine Library Associates of Sonoma County,
2001

Introduction

By Bo Simons

This conversation between Mike Topolos and Louis Pagani represents a touching snapshot of Sonoma County wine history. We regret we do not have more of Louis Pagani's recollections, but what we have here is precious. Louis Pagani lived a long, productive, hard and active life as a farmer in the Glen Ellen area. Born on his farm, he worked the land his father bought from the First World War past the First Gulf War. During the last few years of his life grapes from his vineyard achieved world acclaim. This conversation conveys the crusty character of old Louis, his profane earthy wit, the sharp regrets over missed business opportunities from his middle years and some still sharply remembered childhood traumas. The interview also suggests how hard and long his working life was, but augments it with wonderful, poetic details that lighten and add grace notes to the rough working music of ranch and vineyard life.

Louis' father Felice came to this country in the late 19th Century from the area around Lake Como in Italy. The name Pagani was vibrant in the Sonoma Valley. Another pair of Pagani brothers had a winery in the area. Louis was born on the ranch his father had in 1902 and worked the land until he died in 2000. He started working in the vineyards during World War I. As with many farmers, grapes were but a part of the farm. The Paganis derived much of their income from a dairy they ran until 1969. Louis cherished the vineyards that he helped plant and tended by hand for four score years. He survived lean, tough years and saw booms and busts, prohibition and repeal. He took deserved pride in the fact that wine made from his grapes made was recognized by *Wine Spectator* as among the best in the world several years running. Both Ridge and St. Francis have built reputations on Pagani Vineyard zinfandel. This victory is sweet to Louis who some years earlier had his grapes refused by some wineries who called his fruit, "junk grapes."

Michael Topolos stands as perhaps the perfect interviewer for this project with a working knowledge of the local terroir and a firm grasp of the area's history. Michael has been a Sonoma County vintner since 1972, when he bought a vineyard here. In 1978 he bought the winery that became Topolos at Russian River Vineyards. This acclaimed winery has long been a West County landmark. So he understands what it takes to layout and put in vines, work a vineyard and make wine from it. He appreciates how important good fruit is to good wine, and how precious old vines are. More importantly he knows Sonoma County's wine history. He has written several books on Sonoma County's wine history, taught classes on numerous wine-related subjects, and, as this interview shows, sought out and captured the memories of some of the individuals who made the history. Perhaps most important Michael Topolos found a rapport with Louis Pagani, a trust built on a shared values: a love of the land, a sense of humor and mutual respect. As you read this oral history, short as it is, you sense the understated good fellowship of farmers talking about the land.

Wine Library Associates of Sonoma County—Oral History Series

Louis Pagani

Interviewed by Michael John Topolos

Glen Ellen, California

September 8, 1994: 10:22 A.M.

Transcription by Gail Ryan, Healdsburg December 1994

Comments by Marie Pagani Meursinge, grandniece of Louis Pagani

The Interview is taking place in Mr. Pagani's home, in the kitchen.

Michael Topolos: What I wanted to ask you is the history of the Pagani family, how the Pagani family started in Sonoma County. Where your parents came from — things like that.

Louis Pagani: That's okay, I think that I have most of that.

Topolos: Your parents—were they born in America?

Pagani: No, they were born in Italy in a little town by the name of Fenegro close to Lake Como (Lago Como).

Topolos: Both your parents?

Pagani: Both, yes.

Topolos: Did they both have brothers and sisters that you could remember?

Pagani: They both had a slew of them, but I don't remember them, no. My dad's family had twelve kids. (Chuckles) You can imagine remembering all of those. I don't know how many were in my mom's family, there was at least five or six. But my dad's I'm positive was twelve kids.

Topolos: Big families back then.

Pagani: Oh, God, yes, they put them to work, too, early. My mom had to work in a silk factory when she was about ten — twelve. They would haul her up there to the town of Como, that's where the silk factory was. They had the damn silk worms, they would take them out and put them somehow in hot water, the goddamn things would unwind, and they had to make stuff out of them. A lot of the kids went blind from the lights. They were in a place that was kind of underground, they had walls made out of rocks. (My mother) said that in the winter you could see the damn moisture, the water running down the walls, a lot of the kids got sick (tuberculosis). They would transport them from Fenegro to Como in a duck cart, that's what they had for transportation.

[These silk factory girls pulled the cart to their homes and collected food contributions to live on at the silk factory. My grandmother, Lou's mother, remembered lots of cabbage and polenta flour.]

Do you know what a duck cart is, drawn by one horse? We had one for years, damn it, I sold it for five dollars, like a stupid ass. Wish I had it, just for fun. We did a lot of work with that in the winery, dumping pomace and all stuff like that, saved a lot of shoveling, for a short trip it was swell. You know we had twelve acres of grapes around here, [around here-across from our Glen Ellen Winery on Arnold Drive where Carmenet tasting room now is.] hell instead of loading and unloading it, why hell we would just take it up there and dump the damn thing, it was real fast, real quick. Then we would haul gravel with it from the Sonoma Creek, it was right close by and we hauled it up in the yard. We had gravel in there that high. Pulled it right out of the creek with a duck cart. There was one steep place to come out that I had to put two horses, one in front of the other, not tandem.

Topolos: That's a lot of weight.

Pagani: Solid weight and coming up the bank it was steep coming out of the creek, a little piece about 20 feet was real steep.

Topolos: Tape skip

Pagani: I went to high school, I don't know what year it was. You can put that down too, I sold wine for 25¢ a gallon. And we had glasses of about that high, like a jelly glass.

Topolos: Looks like about six or eight ounces.

Pagani: Now that would cost you \$2.00-\$4.00 at a bar.

Topolos: Yes. Did your parents move to America?

Pagani: Yeah. My dad, the first time he moved, he went to Vermont. He worked there for a family for about two years and then he came over to California.

Topolos: Do you remember those years?

Pagani: No, that was before he was married. He worked for practically nothing.

Topolos: From Vermont did he go back to Italy?

Pagani: No, he went direct to California after Vermont, from Vermont to California.

Topolos: And what year?

Pagani: Gosh I don't know. It was before the turn of the century, I know that. I have a sister that was born before the turn of the century, I know



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that— about six-eight years before the turn of the century. Take your pick, that's about as close as I can get it.

Topolos: Okay, 1890 something like that.

Pagani: Yeah. He went to work at Monte Rosso up here, it used to be Goldstein Vineyards. Martini owns it now, I think, isn't it?

Topolos: That's correct.

Pagani: He worked for \$18 dollars a month, from sunup to sundown, for room and board but they had to do extra work. My dad had to take care of the horses morning and night, feed them and clean the barn and my mom helped the Missus with cooking, wash dishes for the men and so forth. They did many things for food.

Topolos: How do you think the food was back then?

Pagani: Oh, rough and rugged. Salami and cheese, meat and hogs—they did a lot of sausages in those days. They usually had raised a pig or two. They slaughtered the darn things and put them away. And they would kill a calf or so, they had three cows. I know that my dad had to milk the cows morning and night, sometimes they had three sometimes they had two (cows for milking). You know sometimes they don't always milk year around, sometimes you have three to milk sometimes two or one, I don't know exactly how many. You have to give them some time to rest, they would take two three months to rest every year.

They had to do that extra to compensate for their board and room. They lived like hobos when they were first married, they lived in a lean-to like a little chicken house which was up against the bank—like a sod house, one side was right against the bank and two sides sloped down. You know, like they had in the olden days in the plains, sod houses they called them, sometimes they even had the roof (made out of sod) dirt, goats would go there up and jump around on the top. But this one, I saw it one time, this one had a decent roof on it, but the one side was nothing but dirt.

Topolos: Just kind of built into the hill.

Pagani: Yeah, like the old winery down there on the lower ranch, something similar to that. They went in there and dug a hole in the side of the bank, just a one room affair I think.

Puch: What was your mother's name?

Pagani: Angela [Bogani].

Topolos: And father?

Pagani: Felice Pagani.

Topolos: When were they married?

Pagani: They were married up there at the Goldstein Vineyard, that's all I know. When did we say he came over here to California?

Topolos: About 1890's.

Pagani: That's about when he got married.

Topolos: His oldest daughter was born in 1896?

Pagani: A year later, nine months (after they were married).

Topolos: Your sister was Rose. And then who came after?

Pagani: Charles.

Topolos: When was he born?

Pagani: Oh, he was five years older than I am, go back five years from 1902.

Topolos: May 5, 1898.

Pagani: That was about it.

Topolos: Then you came next?

Pagani: No, there was another little girl. She passed away, she was only about six months old. Maybe we should not even mention her, I don't know what disease it was. Nobody knows to this day what the hell it was, something like that Crib business I guess.

Topolos: Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

Pagani: Yeah. And then another sister, Mamie, we called her Mamie. She's about two years older than I am, I presume, I'm not positive but that's close enough.

Topolos: 1899.

Pagani: I was next, I was born in Nineteen ought Two, then Olive, she's five years younger than I am, 1907. Then little baby Paul, he died when he was about four years old of spinal meningitis. In those days they didn't know what it was.

That was it—seven kids [Rose, Charles, baby girl, Mamie, Louis, Olive & Paul]. We all worked in those days. We didn't have time to go to school much. They put us in harness real young. Although they didn't force us to do it, we were just willing. We realized that he had a big family and he had to work for us, we felt sorry for him, he had to have help and we all kind of dug in and helped to the best of our ability. My dad operated close to two thousand acres at one time, all with horses, believe it or not. He had the horse ranch here, that's when they had the quarry up there, too.

Topolos: In Kenwood?

Pagani: Yeah, that was a thousand acres. We had five or six (hundred acres) down here, another was 460 acres at Clark's place back there, piece at Granelli's 350 (acres) up in the back there, 65-75 acres down here, then we had this one all together.

Topolos: What did you have on the acreage?

Pagani: Up there we had hay and a small amount of grapes, that's Hall's ranch.

Topolos: Hall's?

Pagani: It was Hall's, it's Kunde's now, it's where Kunde has the winery. We had a small amount of grapes, about ten, with the piece in the back too, about twenty acres I'd say, that's all they had in those days.

Topolos: Do you know what varieties?

Pagani: No, I think they were mostly zinfandel.

We bought that winery down there, that was the year that we had the comet (Halley's Comet of 1910). And we had a terrific wind, I think it was 1912, wasn't it?

Topolos: I'd have to look it up.

Pagani: You weren't even born (chuckles). We had a terrific wind and we came off with about five ton off of about twenty acres. It just blew everything off.

Topolos: Was the wind during flowering?

Pagani: No hell, they were getting ready to pick.

Topolos: It blew the grapes off the vine?

Pagani: Yes, yes. Christ they were all over the ground, they weren't ripe yet, we lost our pants on that deal.

And the rest of (the property) was in grain and the hills we ran cattle up there. My dad did rather, I was a little fart, I was only about eight years old.

Topolos: Terrific memory.

Pagani: You know something happens today I can't remember. You give me your name or you introduce me to somebody and hell five minutes later I can't remember. That's a fact. When I open a gate or something like that I double check because I forget to close the darn thing. Or if I open a faucet, I'll let this run while I go feed the bull, then I'll turn it off under the peach tree, hell if I don't double check I'll forget the goldarn thing. That's happened a couple of times already this year. (chuckles) That's why I double check.

Topolos: What are some of your earliest recollections? Where were you born?

Pagani: I was born on the lower ranch.

Topolos: Right here on the property.

Pagani: Olive and I were both born down there.

Topolos: What I want to get is a feel of your day when you were a child.

Pagani: It was rough.

Topolos: Chores to do?

Pagani: Oh yeah.

Topolos: What about school?

Pagani: We walked. From that ranch we walked down the railroad tracks, school was below where it is now on the opposite side. You know that little hump after you passed the school, that steep little pitch there? On the left side there is a rocky spot, that's where the school was. We had to walk that distance regardless if it was raining, frost or what the hell. There were no buses.

Topolos: What was the name of the school?

Pagani: Dunbar, same as this. One room school house. No running water, outside privies, and we all drank out of the same bucket, we had a dipper, and we all drank out of that same one dipper, if one had a cold the whole school got it. Then in the summer the well would go dry and then we used to go up, you know where Joe Gallo is now?

Topolos: Yes.

Pagani: There was a spring, Mr. Vito owned that valley, and he let us go in there and take a bucket full of water down to the school for the kids to drink. There was no water to wash your face or any damn thing, there was no running water whatsoever.

Topolos: How many children were in the school?

Pagani: Oh hell, in the end there were only about eight or ten, they had to close it because there weren't enough kids. Then they built Glen Ellen and the school up on the hill burnt down, I remember that. They moved into our building down there, we were getting \$25 a month rent for school kids. We had running water and everything. Those goddamn kids would throw stuff down the toilet and it would plug up and cost us \$25 practically a month to have the plumber unplug the sewer.

Do you know where that is?

Topolos: No.

Pagani: Do you know where the old Gaige house is? It's a Bed & Breakfast now, it's up for sale for a million and a half I saw it advertised, something like that. My dad paid \$3000 for it and it was in run-down shape. He kept it for several years, we put all new underpinning, concrete foundation, it was all getting rotten. We built a new fence and painted it and everything. Painted the building, he had that done too. And then the Depression came along and Prohibition. By God, my dad had to sell it, the growers—we had bought a lot of grapes because my dad had an idea that Prohibition was going to last a year or two. Instead it went 13 (years) or something. The growers were pressing for their money, although my dad didn't have to pay them because he said he would pay them when he sold the wine. But we all felt kind of guilty. The poor bastards needed the money real bad. So he sold (the house). Do you know what he got for it? Three thousand dollars. He kissed away about three thousand in improvements and what not. Yeah, he lost money on that deal, but he kept the growers happy anyway so let's put it that way. I think that had something to do with my dad getting sick, he got cancer of the throat and he wasn't a heavy smoker either. He hardly smoked at all, once in awhile a pipe.

Topolos: Angelo Bogani?

Pagani: That's my uncle, they were here by the way, two weeks ago. They are relatives from the old country (Italy).

Topolos: That's right, they came out to the winery (Russian River Vineyards). [Angelo's niece and grandniece visited from Fenegro, Italy.]

Pagani: That's right, now that you mention it.

Topolos: That was very nice.

Tape skips — a question

Pagani: I would tell you — but I can't---

Topolos: There's plenty of time. I just want to kind of get things categorized.

Pagani: Get the outline first and then fill in the odds and ends later?

Topolos: Yes. Your earliest recollections—school, what you ate, where you played, who your friends were.

Pagani: I can remember kids names now that I went to school with, and I can hardly remember yours. I don't know your first name yet, I don't think. I know it is Topolos.

Topolos: Well, my first name is Michael.

Pagani: Well, that's easier to remember than Topolos.

I got a nephew by the name of Michael.

Those days were pretty rough. Did I tell you we had tramps on the railroad track, [Southern Pacific railroad track bisected the Pagani Ranch. The railroad built a small station on the ranch called Felice Station,} We had to meet them going back and forth. Like for my sisters, for example, it wasn't very nice. Nowadays it would be murder to have a kid walk up and down the railroad tracks. Then they had bundle sticks, they were at the house all the time asking for handouts. My mom would always give them something. When the railroad was still operating, we got a lot of them. Sometimes they would sleep in the barn. One time one of the men went in to feed the horses and untied a horse to get water and there was a darn tramp in the manger. One time there was a kid from Eldridge, they used to run away from Eldridge all the time, one was in the manger. [Eldridge, then called the State Home for the Feeble-minded; now the Sonoma Developmental Center.] Another time two girls came up from Eldridge and they were going to go in the wood shed out there to sleep. And the dogs started raising hell, we had about three dogs and I went outside to see what was going on and deal with these two girls, one was black and one was white. I took them down to the barn, my sister gave me a couple of blankets, I took them down, in those days we had a bunch of loose hay in there (they could sleep on).

In those days, labor was cheap and we were all willing to work, so we hauled the hay, it was cheaper than baling. Nowadays they are so god-damn lazy they don't know how to haul, they don't want to haul it (unless it is baled). So we have to have it baled, a little piddy thing like that. Hell, I used to haul three-four times that amount loose.

Anyway I put the buggers to bed. The next morning it was rainy, drizzling, so we had to give them breakfast, and let them go to the bathroom. Then we gave them an umbrella and they took off down the highway, I was standing out there watching and every time they would see a car come they would turn and look this way and make-believe they were walking this way. I guess they didn't want the teachers to recognize them, maybe they thought they were looking for them from Eldridge. They got back (to Eldridge) and about three months later the white girl came back up again. This was about 11:00 and I was busier than hell. I had milk to deliver, I had to haul the milk. I said, 'I have got to go into town to haul the milk.' Fine, but then she wanted to stay. I said, "No, no, no, you get in and I'll take you down as far as the Y (in the road) before you head to Glen Ellen. I'll drop you there. You go back to Eldridge." She finally did.

It was a hectic time for those birdle stiffes. They weren't mean or anything like that, they were pretty good guys in comparison to what we have now. A lot of them would offer to chop wood, make kindling for you, to pay for their grub. As a rule my mom didn't have them work.

Topolos: You have old photographs, sometime I would like to get together to see old newspapers—

Pagani: Oh, yeah we have some.

Topolos: That will trigger a lot of memories. Next time or the time after when we have a recording session.

Pagani: We bought the winery in 1912, down in Glen Ellen. I'm quite sure.

Topolos: Which winery was that?

Pagani: The one before you hit Eldridge.

Topolos: That was the Glen Ellen Winery?

Pagani: It used to be the Glen Ellen Winery, not now.

Topolos: I've seen old labels.

Where did your dad get all this money?

Pagani: Oh, he saved it. We both worked. My mom worked like a horse, and so did he. My mom boarded the men. It was a dollar a day in those days. A dollar a day for nine hours and board and room. Later we went to eight hours (a day). They paid them in \$20 gold pieces, I remember. He had them hidden up there just below the second floor in the winery, he had them in a coffee can. So that's how he paid them, he paid them about twice a year. So then they would go out and get a big drunk, most of them, not all of them, but some of them did.

My mom worked, believe it or not for one dollar a month she washed by hand.

Topolos: She washed—

Pagani: She got barely enough to pay for the soap, poor woman, for one dollar a month. Her own kids and all the hired men, she still washed for them. No hot water when my mom was first here. We had a thing on the side of the wood stove, a little tank that held, oh, I would say maybe ten gallons and you had to wait for that to warm up.

She made bread, all the bread for the men for years, did you ever see these ovens that are made like an Alaskan igloo except it doesn't have the entrance it just has a little square hole (Italian ovens). And you put a lot of wood in there, four foot, two foot of wood and you get it hotter than hell. Then when you get it hot you scrape all the doggone coals and everything out make it nice and clean. She would go get her bread, she had it all on a long wooden affair about so wide. And she would have one-two-three-four-five-six or seven loafs, big round loafs, great big, big things and she would push them in and close the door, it had to be air tight. I don't know how long she left them in there. When they came out they were damn good to eat. One when it was fresh was real good. But after about four days, it was tougher than hell. (chuckles) But that was all we had.

Topolos: What did you eat then?

Pagani: We had bread, cheese, sausages, salami, a lot of salami.



Pagani Ranch Barn

Topolos: Did you make your own cheese?

Pagani: Yes, my mom made her own cheese, we had our own cows. Hell, I was milking two-three cows when I was about ten years old. I had to carry from the other side of the pump house by the railroad tracks I had to carry the goddamn milk all the way up to Norma's house. That was further than from here to the tracks. [1/4 mile] [Norma's house is the house on the ranch nearest Glen Ellen. Lou was born here in 1902.] Sometimes I'd have two buckets full, boy by the time I got to the house it was goddamn heavy. In the fall when there wasn't very much feed there for the cows I'll carry a sack of hay down on my back and two buckets in the other hand, two empty buckets. Then I'd leave the feed sack down there and carry the two buckets in my hands. In fact I have a picture of that there.

Topolos: I'd like to see that next time.

Pagani: If I can find it.

Topolos: Well, if you can find it.

Pagani: We'll try to find some of the doggone things.

Topolos: What kind of pre-school memories do you have of when you were a child growing up, before you went to school.

Pagani: Well, all I know is that my sister couldn't speak English and the teacher would make her sit with me because she couldn't speak English and I could be the interpreter. So all the kids would poke fun at me for sitting with a girl. I didn't like it. I can remember that.

Our teacher received, I remember what she was getting, \$75 a month for teaching. Some of them boarded up there at the old Wise Ranch, I don't know what it is called now. Another one lived up in Nuns Canyon, Miss Howard. Seventy-five dollars a month, compare that with what they get now, and they are still bellyaching.

Topolos: How far did you get through school?

Pagani: I went to the ninth grade, that's all.

Topolos: And where was that school in Santa Rosa?

Pagani: No, Sonoma High School. I could have gone longer, but I just quit. I preferred the farm to going to school. I didn't like going to school much, I took up the wrong subjects, I didn't like them. English, History, Ancient History what the hell did I care what happened a hundred thousand years ago, it wasn't helping me any in my line of work. I loved farming, I rather be out there plowing with horses. When I was a kid I loved it. I like to break horses and stuff like that, I did a lot of that. I broke saddle horses, draft horses, and in fact I did all of it for the ranch. Twenty-two horses all lined up in the fall plowing for grain up here in the horse ranch, all lined up there in the barn. But I

wasn't breaking horses then, I was too young, I was only ten years old, I guess, twelve.

One time I was coming home from up there, I had walked up there, I came across that field there, where it is kind of swampy, between Kunde's barn and where that restaurant was, used to be Bunny's [now the Kenwood Restaurant]. There was wheat in there and it was way over my head, I got in the middle of the cockeyed thing and I didn't know where I was and which way to go. I got lost. Jesus Christ I got scared. Then I happened to hear something over there, a buggy or wagon or something go by over here I thought by God that's where the road is I'd better head that direction. I went that direction and I come out in the little swampy piece there by that creek where Kunde put that vineyard in. It was real swampy in those days. Then I came home, we were still living down there on the lower ranch, we hadn't bought this one yet. That bothered me for a while no kidding, the damn field was so big and I couldn't see over the top of the goddamn wheat. I was wondering if I would ever get out of there. Around four o'clock I said now if I keep running around in here I'll never get out of here it would be dark before long. I remember being pretty worried.

Topolos: How about hobbies?

Pagani: Hobbies? Well, I never had any except riding. That was my biggest hobby. I never had any, I was what they call a workaholic. I worked all the time, seven days a week, eleven hours a day when I had the dairy. That went on for years.

Topolos: How many head?

Pagani: Twenty.

Topolos: All milked by hand?

Pagani: At first, yeah. And then I gave up, the muscles in my back got so they used to burn all the time, over tired I guess from working long hours. Hell, I worked all day in the vineyard then came home at four thirty and milked cows. I got through about six at night. So then I bought milking machines. The last five-six years I had milking machines. And then I sold. My brother passed away and I had the goddamn winery on my hands, what the hell, it was just too damn much for me.

Topolos: Now which brother?

Pagani: Charles.

Topolos: And you were partners in the winery?

Pagani: Yeah, fifty-fifty.

Topolos: But did he run the winery?

Pagani: Yes, he ran the winery and I ran this end.

Topolos: How was he as a business man? Pretty good?

Pagani: Not too good, I'm afraid. He was something like these ball players, he would get too greedy. He wanted to expand, expand, expand, you know. He wanted to do to, to that, do the other thing. Of course we built all those goddamn buildings down there. When we bought it all it had was the old distillery on that lower section. They tore that down now, what they torn down that was all we had there. On this side there was nothing, we built all those goddamn crappy buildings around there. This upper place where the barn was, we torn that down and we put in that building. There are a bunch of screwballs in there now, I don't know what the hell they sell. Anyway, one building alone cost us at least \$10,000. And we got \$90,000 for the whole works, twelve acres of vineyard up on the hill, and all the buildings on that side, we put them in. All the concrete floors, we put all them in the winery. Hauled the tanks down from the upper ranch, all the tanks from here, they all went down there. We bought tanks galore, concrete tanks, new crusher, new press, all that crap. We got stuck with all that.

Topolos: What years are we talking about?

Pagani: Oh, gosh. I can't say. I'll have to do some [research] to find out. [The buildings were put in 1943-45. After WWII the wine market collapsed.]

Topolos: Was this before Prohibition?

Pagani: No, it was after. We did all right (during Prohibition). We could have sold the god damn place just what we had originally there when we bought it, we could have sold it for \$225,000. We wound up putting all those new buildings in there and all that goddamn crap, all extra, and then we would up selling the son-of-a-bitch for \$90,000 eventually.

Topolos: How many tons were you bringing into the winery there?

Pagani: Oh, Jesus, we were crushing like crazy there for awhile. Another crusher, we had a brand new crusher put in across the creek. Did you know that we had two railroads there across the creek at the time. Do you remember that?

Topolos: I wasn't here.

Pagani: Oh, no. Well, we put in a siding, Northwestern put in a siding for us right opposite the winery, purposely for us. We used to have grapes shipped in from Lodi and whatnot, San Joaquin Valley.

We had two men over there (at the winery) shoveling into the damn crusher. Then we had the pump that pumped it across, they had a four inch or six inch, I forget which, pipe push it over into the tanks across the tracks. We were working 24 hours a day, had two or three shifts. The poor buggers stood out there all night long pushing that goddamn stuff into the crusher. Then they would pump it over there. And we would do the same thing when we shipped wine. We'd run hoses over the bridge. We built a little bridge, oh about so wide, so we could roll

barrels over there too. We shipped a lot of 50 gallons barrels, we rolled the barrels across the creek and into the cars and then we'd pump the wine into them. And we also loaded a lot of gondolas, we loaded a lot of them.

We had grapes come in to Glen Ellen before we had the spur put in there across from the winery. Hell, I was only about 15, I was driving a four horse team, hauling the goddamn grapes from Glen Ellen. You know where the Southern Pacific was up there. You know where Gemini's store is?

Topolos: Yes.

Pagani: You go up that hill, it's steep as hell. About twelve barrels of 50 gallon barrels of wine on that four horse team boy you had to pull like a son-of-a-bitch, especially in the winter when it was muddy, it wasn't paved or nothing then. There were big chuckholes like that. Coming down with grapes, I'd haul five tons of grapes on a load on a wagon with a four horse team. Coming down that hill there I'd be scared shitless sometimes. I was afraid it would break and I'd wind up in the goddamn road and maybe there would be a car coming the other way or a team and I would run into them. Boy, I used to keep my fingers crossed, I was kind of scared, I was only 15 at the most. Let's see, I had just got through going to high school, yeah, I was about 15. I would lift those son-of-a-bitching boxes, and the (rail) car was long, you had to pick those boxes up and somewhere way on this end and you had to go to the door and then put them in the wagon, stack them up five-six high, a fifteen year old boy. Boy!

Topolos: What type of boxes back then?

Pagani: They didn't weight much though, they were great big boxes, they were bigger then these you got nowadays. They were about 65 pounds if they were full, but you know it was so damn hot down there by the time they got up here, I don't know how long it would take them to get here. But by the time they got to Glen Ellen, Christ, they had shrunk so they were like raisins, they had shrunk down.

We would get three tiers across, three boxes straight across or four, I forget which. We could handle about five tons, because we weighed every load. About five tons on the damn thing when we got through weighing the empties, we had to weigh the tare, which they don't do now, because they have no boxes, they don't use them anymore. Thank God.

Topolos: It's a lot of work.

Pagani: Yeah, god, you don't know how many times you had to handle them. Dump the damn boxes into the crusher, then you had to stack the empties on the side to make room. And then when you have a big hole in there you had to start putting them back on your own truck. But you always had a big gob of them out here that you had to pick up when you first started.

Topolos: Your social life as a teenager?

Pagani: Oh I didn't have much. I worked most of the time. Once in a while on a Saturday I would go up to the coast or go to a show, that was about it, a movie. They were about five-ten cents, a quarter at the most in those days. One of them in Santa Rosa they called the "Flea House" I think it was ten cents. I'd go over to the coast sometimes, we'd go over there and have a picnic, that wasn't very often.

Topolos: How long would it take you to get out to the coast?

Pagani: We had cars then, we didn't go over on horses. I went up the Navarro River in two days with horses, we made it in a day and a half. We took off in the morning at noon and wound up in Windsor and we camped there overnight. Then we went all the rest of the way the next day, I think. We stayed at the big redwoods, I think it's a park now, I don't know what they call it. On the Navarro River, the old redwoods, this was in August, Jesus, they were big, you couldn't even see the sunshine. We went up there, we had a buckboard, my dad had a buckboard, it had two seats. We had two (buckboards) in fact one of them had three seats. Two of us kids had saddle horses, I had a saddle horse and another kid had a saddle horse. We rode behind. The women and the two men rode in the buckboard. So we stayed up there about four-five days, Jesus it was a beautiful place, God Almighty. There were enormous trees, holy Christ, that oak tree of ours down there at its base is small compared to them. You couldn't even see the sun. It's a park now, I'm pretty sure.

End of side 1

(Starts in conversation)

Topolos: Did you buy from the Chauvets? Did you buy the winery from his father?

Pagani: Yes, Arsene's father. His grandfather built everything. [Joshua Chauvet was the grandfather who built most of Glen Ellen. Henry was his son.] He was a good guy, good hearted guy. He was kind of easy going. Hell, he would loan out everything, half of it didn't come back and half of what did come back was broken, but he never would say anything.

The tramps used to camp there by Sonoma Creek, about four o'clock old Henry used to go down and give them all a drink. He would never do any work. They practically owned Glen Ellen at one time. That's no kidding. They owned the water works, they owned rentals all over town there. That's grandpa that had accumulated all that and Henry went through the whole goldarn works. The guy was—I wouldn't say that he was simple minded but the next thing to it. But he was a good kid. Those (Chauvet) kids were about 12 or 14, I guess, and the youngest boy—the parents thought that they would do him a big favor for Christmas, so they bought them both a 22 (rifle) for Christmas. On Christmas Day Eve why the oldest boy went down to the barn to milk the cow, Arsene, he was the youngest, he was the one that I used to chum around with, he was my friend. Well, his brother was coming up

from the barn with a bucket of milk in his hand over here, and Arsene was over here on this side of the house. Just exactly when the older brother got around the corner Arsene shot at something over there and killed his brother. Arsene couldn't speak for a month or two, shock. He went into a coma like, he couldn't talk. Then after awhile he got over it, he's a good kid, Arsene. In fact we still write back and forth around Christmas time. Damn it I don't know why they bought the kid a 22, Christ, he was only about nine or ten years old. At that age they are liable to forget themselves and shoot at things, and he did shoot his brother accidentally. That is too goddamn young to have a gun. A BB gun is bad enough you can put a guy's eye out with it. I'll never forget that.

- Topolos: What was his name?
- Pagani: The oldest one? The one that got killed? I can't remember, if you remember next time ask me, it will come to me.
- Topolos: What was the other boy's name.
- Pagani: Arsene, A-r-s-e-n-e. I went to school with him.
- Topolos: So, he was your buddy?
- Pagani: Yes. We used to go fishing and all that.
- Topolos: Where did you fish?
- Pagani: All those creeks around there, Sonoma Creek. There was trout in that little creek that goes up to (Jack) London House, that burnt down, [the Wolf House] there was trout in there. Salmon used to go up past the road there, we used to get salmon out of that little creek there.
- Topolos: Big fish?
- Pagani: Oh yeah. We used to get salmon but not now anymore, nothing, that creek is almost dry. Some places have that green scum on there.
- Topolos: I read once that Chauvet dammed up the creek and made a hatchery. Do you know anything about it?
- Pagani: No, that was before my time. I remember the waterwheel, where they had the waterwheel, that place is still there. In fact, these guys that bought it from us, rebuilt the waterwheel put it in the exact place where the Chauvets had it. Old grandpa was a go-getter, but Henry he was (chuckles) he was a good-hearted guy. He talked to kids, he laughed, he didn't gave a damn he talked to anyone. And he had no business head whatsoever. Holy Christ. They sold a little house here and rental house there. Hell, they had ten or fifteen rental houses around Glen Ellen. So one by one (it was gone)—he wouldn't work. The only thing I ever known him to do, he wrote a little insurance and that's about all. He had insurance, he had a big building there with high ceilings, I remember that. Arsene and I would chum back and forth, he'd sleep down at our place with me and then I'd go up sleep at his

house. Boy, (Henry) would smoke cigars like a mother, he was always smoking cigars. You would walk in that damn room—and they never had a window up—it would damn near knock you over. Another time Arsene Chauvet stole a cigar from his old man, his dad was always smoking. He took it down to the winery. We just made a big trip up to the London House up the creek, just go straight up the creek to the London House. And we ate berries on the way, on the way back we stopped up there—he had snatched the cigar off his father, the bugger had been smoking before and I didn't know it—so he offered me half of the cigar. We went under the distillery and we lit up, Jesus, did I get sick, boy I puked up all the blackberries. Arsene he laughed like hell, he thought that was funny, but he'd been doing it all the time, I never knew it. I was only 14-13, holy cow I was sick. I didn't smoke till I was 31 after that. (laughs) I never touched a smoke. Then I went into cigars, cigarettes, tobacco until about 70, then I quit completely. That was a long stretch. God I'll never forget that I was sick as a dog, God Almighty. (chuckles) I was vomiting (so much) I thought that I would throw my guts up, holy cow.

In the old days, we didn't have any radios or TVs we had nothing else to pass the time, so we had to make our own fun. We built a raft out in the goldarn creek. We dragged the ties down from the railroad, discarded ties. And then I got a hammer and nails and a saw and Arsene came down and helped me. We made strips across the top of them and nailed them all together, and then we had some big long sticks we poked in there. There are some big holes in (the creek). There were big old fish in there that long. I don't know what the hell they were. We had a lot of fun.

Topolos: Do you remember boats coming up the creek?

Pagani: No, but I was told that they used to come up as far as Glen Ellen. I can't believe it.

Topolos: I've seen a picture, but it is hard to believe.

Pagani: I've heard of it, I remember them coming up as far as Schellville, but not to Glen Ellen. That was before my time. I was told that but I couldn't believe it, you know there is quite a drop there, I think. I don't see how the devil (it got through) there must have been a lot more water than there is now. How a boat come up there now I don't know, hardly any water left. And what is in there is very unsanitary, scummy looking, deathly, weedish.

Topolos: Do you know anything about Jack London?

Pagani: Yes. I saw him several times. (Jack London) was quite a drinking man, well, he was good hearted too, he was a good guy. He used to come through our place you know, instead of going around through Glen Ellen and up this way, he would come through the back there. He would go up through Clarks, we had a road through that 460 acre place that we leased. And that was right close to his place, across the road there and then come up the back and come down through where Clark lives now and Judge Cook lived there. He used to own some of our

place. We bought that ranch down there from Judge Cook. He came through there and then he'd stop at Judge Cook's, they were all good drinking men in those days, they would hoist a few highballs. That's all the poor buggers had to kill time. And then he would go out on the highway and go to Kenwood and he would stop up there at what they called "Sam's Bar." All the old-timers got together there and they would hoist a few. He would go home feeling pretty good. Sometimes they had a four horse team and they had bells on the leaders, of the two front leaders, they had those little bells. He would go to Glen Ellen Christ everybody would love to see him come, of course, he would treat the gang, you know. But he got a lot of information out of them for writing his books. Like Martin Eden he was a local guy. He hauled grapes to our winery down there, this winery down here by Norma's House. [Our first winery built into the hillside by Lou's father Felice Pagani.] He hauled grapes through the back road there and down through there, from—where the hell did he haul them from—London's ranch. (Jack London) wrote a book about Martin Eden, it was kind of dry, I didn't like it.

Topolos: I remember the book, but I don't remember the details.

Pagani: I read a lot of his books like *Call of the Wild*, I enjoyed that.

Topolos: That was a wonderful book.

Pagani: He loved to treat the guys in Glen Ellen. They would all belly up to the bar, boy, they were happy as hell. They were crazy bastards, they would get half drunk.

Turns off recorder to tell story.

Pagani: Ten cents for a shave, I'm not kidding. One time I went there, and that was in the Bootlegging days, Frank Thierkoff was his name, he was a heavy drinker. He was the barber, so I went there and says, "How about getting a haircut?" to Frank. And he closes the door, he said, "I can't give you a haircut I'm awfully shaky today. I'm shaky, shaky." He said, "I'll give you a haircut if you give me a quarter. I'll go across the bridge to the Chauvet Hotel and get me a drink and then I'll give you a haircut." I said, "Well, I hate to wait that long, but okay." I gave him the quarter. So he goes across the bridge to the Chauvet Hotel, gets himself a drink of that White Mule [grappa brandy]. It did a pretty good job too, he calmed right down.

I still remember they didn't have no outlet for the sink where you washed your utensils and so forth, he had a bucket under there. I guess the pipes were plugged up or he had torn it apart. That bucket was receiving the dregs from the wash basin. Oh, boy you had to be tough in those days to exist I tell you. He had one lung, he may have had TB at one time for all I know, but he had one lung, he couldn't do any heavy work. That was during Prohibition, he had a still going back there someplace. That day he was a mess, he was sure shaky. He didn't cut me or anything, he did all right.

Another old-timer had a bar right in the same building. He used to wear these things way up here.

Topolos: Garters.

Pagani: Right.

Topolos: Do you remember the names of any of the bars in Glen Ellen?

Pagani: Very few, Pancrazzi was one of them, the Chauvet Hotel, Thierkoff there are three of them.

Topolos: That's pretty good.

Pagani: There are others, I know their names, I just can't come up with it. Sobbe Bar. There were a bunch of others but I can't remember their names. I know where they were located more or less.

Topolos: Is that when San Francisco people used to come up?

Pagani: Oh yeah, especially on the Northwestern (railroad), there were a lot of them. They had a park, where the brickyard was, they had a park. Do you know where the brickyard was coming down from the London ranch, just as you hit town. There used to be a blacksmith's shop there too, but it burnt down, and a dance hall, right in Glen Ellen. Coming down from the London Ranch and it was right on that side.

Topolos: On the side of the hotel now?

Pagani: You go past that hotel that they built ten-twelve years ago, do you know where the cannon is? You go past the cannon, on that side and up in there is where the park is. They used to have turkey shoots there Sundays, lots of times, for Christmas. You'd go down there and shoot for turkey, win a turkey if you were a good shot. Sometimes you didn't. The guys with scopes they won all the turkeys. There weren't many scopes in those days but the few that did have them came home with three quarters of the turkeys. Those with open sights like us guys we'd come home with nothing. I came home with one turkey, that's all I can remember, just one turkey.

Topolos: Did you have wild turkeys around here?

Pagani: No, not that I can remember. Oh, I heard of a flock down here on this 450 acres that we leased, below Clarks. Some guy told me they were up there hunting mountain lion, there was a mountain lion up there, and he saw (turkey)—he was living in our house where Norma is now, he was renting—so he said he saw them. But I never did. We had that place leased for years and years, I saw deer in there, but I never saw any wild turkey. I saw mountain quail in there, you don't see any of them any more. My brother killed one, in fact several down there on that 450 acre place. God, they are enormous the mountain quail but they don't fly much, they have small wings, they run mostly. There was a flock of them, that was the only time I saw them, I've seen pictures of them. I rode that place down there for years. The first deer I

saw down there I was all excited. I came home—did you know that there were no deer in the valley in those days, not a damn one. You had to go on top of the Sonoma Mountain or over here or up there around Trinity, or up in those high elevation places, there were none in the valley whatsoever. Everybody had hounds you know and they hunted the shit out of them.

Topolos: That's interesting that there were no deer here. That's one of our biggest problems.

Pagani: (Deer) are raising hell this year. There is a piece down there that we sell to St. Francis. You can just about see it from here, it moves, it's brown, it's just bare land. It's about 2 acres they gave us a good price for it too. (The deer) go all over the place, they go over here, they go up to Monte Rosso up there, Goldstein Vineyards, they [Lou's nephew-in-law Richard Amantite and sons who hunt deer] go up this way, they go up to Lake County for a week they camp up there.

Turns off recorder

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Louis Pagani, 1902-2000

Louis Pagani, 98, a member of an old Sonoma Valley farming family, passed away on Nov. 21, in Sonoma. Pagani was born on June 2, 1902, on the Pagani Ranch in Glen Ellen where he lived all his life.

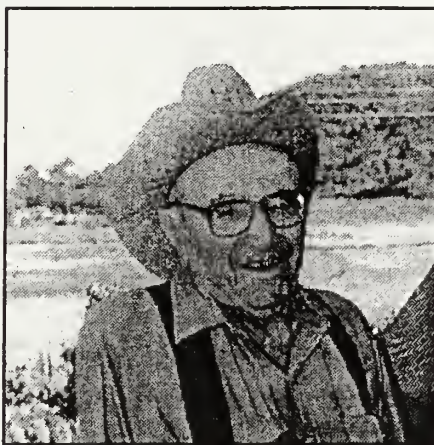
He operated the ranch for many years following the death of his parents, Angela and Felice Pagani.

Although best known in recent years for his award-winning old zinfandel vines, he previously raised pears, prunes, corn, beef and dairy cattle. In addition, in 1969, he was a partner in the Glen Ellen Winery and Distillery, which his parents also established in the early 1900s.

Pagani was known for his honesty, dedication to hard work, and love of the land. He was considered by many over the years as one of the best farmers in the Sonoma Valley. The monument of his life was a good working ranch and the preservation of beautiful open space.

Great nephew Dino Amantite, who works as the vineyard manager for St. Francis Winery, said at Pagani's Nov. 27 service that, "Uncle Louie was a great teacher and everything I learned from him

helped me in my career. The knowledge and wisdom he displayed was incredible...He is now in the company of great friends like Val Rossi and Milton Pezzi, probably trading



Louie Pagani

stories and having a great time being back with his friends."

One of the highlights of his life was having a zinfandel wine made from his grapes named the 10th best wine in the world by Wine Spectator magazine in 1994.

In a 1995 *Press Democrat* article, Pagani is quoted as saying of the recognition, "They called them junk grapes five years ago....It makes us feel kind of good that all of these guys turned us down and now that we are famous they are climbing all over us to buy our

grapes."

A lifelong bachelor, Pagani lived on the 187-acre ranch, located off of Highway 12 between Kenwood and Glen Ellen, with his sister, Olive, who is now 92. Pagani was a hard-working farmer, working with his family during Prohibition and the Great Depression.

"I didn't go to college," Pagani said in the *Press Democrat* article, "They had me driving a four-horse team when I was 12 or 13 years old...I worked seven days a week all of my life and never took a vacation. There was no time for dances or parties."

"The man is irreplaceable," said Dino Amantite. "He will be greatly missed and never, never forgotten."

Pagani was preceded in death by his parents, Angela and Felice Pagani, who established the Pagani Ranch more than 100 years ago.

Pagani is survived by his sister, Olive Pagani; nieces, Marie Meursinge, Charlotte Svinovich, and Norma Amantite; and many great nieces and nephews, and great-great nieces and nephews. He was the brother of the late Charles Pagani and Rose Pagani.

PAGANI, LOUIS, 1902-20
LOUIS PAGANI /

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